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A DAY WITH THE BIRDS OF A HOOSIER SWAMP.

BY BARTON WARRREN EVERMANN.

Have you ever realized how interesting a small swamp may prove to any one who takes the trouble to look at it? Or what a fascinating story it has for him who makes friends with it and tries to learn its secrets?

I fear you never have. Not because you would not like to know, but perhaps because no one has ever tried to interest you in swamps. Most people look upon a swamp merely as a useless, unproductive piece of ground where snakes and mosquitoes and frogs abound; where horses and cattle mire; where one gets wet and covered with vile-smelling mud should he venture therein.

This is what those think and say who do not really know swamps; who view them with prejudiced eye. But let us take a trip to one of our small Hoosier swamps and try to learn its ways. There are thousands of them in the state, all much alike in many respects, yet each possessing peculiarities, a personality I may say, of its own. Let us go to the old Maple Swamp.

Flowing westward through the southern part of Carroll County, Indiana, is a small creek called Middle Fork. Not far from where it is crossed by the Vandalia Railroad it widens out very much, almost losing its identity. Its banks are ill-defined. There is no definite channel, or else the chan-

nel changes from time to time. The country on either side is level and low, and the water from the stream spreads out and the stream dissipates itself among the bushes and trees. A large slough is formed over which the water varies in depth from a few inches to 2 or 3 feet, and the ground is very soft and muddy indeed. Along the border is a fringe of small bushes and vines, and a few oaks, nearly all of which lean inward toward the swamp. Inside this fringe of bushes is a border of marsh-grass and button-bushes. Then come cat-tails (*Typha*), tall water-weeds (*Scirpus*), and water-lilies. Lower down is a dense growth of underbrush and a pretty heavy forest of swamp ash, soft maple, and willows. The yellow pond lily is abundant, growing in the more open shallow places where the bottom is of soft, black mud. Patches of Iris or blue flag are seen here and there. In one place, where there are springs in the bottom and the water is cold, is a patch of that most magnificent of Indiana wild flowers, the beautiful showy Lady's slipper (*Cypripedium reginae*).

We drive to the swamp on a pleasant morning in late May (21st). We put our horses in the barn of a farmer who kindly permits us to do so. We change our clothes for older suits, suitable for wading.

The Great Blue Heron, or "Big Blue Crane," is said to nest in this swamp. "Why," said the man who first told us about it, and who had seen the place in winter, "the nests in the tree-tops look like small haystacks! I saw them plainly as I drove by in my sleigh. I counted over a hundred of them." So we are impatient to see if the nests are occupied this spring. We begin wading out into the marsh. The water is very cold and, as if to add to our unpleasant sensations, the bottom is very uneven, and we often suddenly step into holes deeper than any before; our feet become entangled and we fall headlong into the water. And now we find areas of quicksand into which we are kept from sinking only by catching hold of some prostrate log or nearby limb. Hardly have we entered the swamp when a Great Blue Heron is seen coming from the north. He is high in the air, and approaches

the swamp with long, steady strokes of his mighty wings. But as he nears the margin of the forest he suddenly stretches his neck and legs to their full length, and in a right line, partially closes his wings and swoops down with a whirring noise in a direct line for the top of a large ash, in which is his nest. We have often watched hawks and crows and buzzards descend from heights in this way, but never before have we seen so long a bird as a Great Blue Heron perform the feat, so let us watch him closely. How long he is and how graceful and like an aeroplane he glides in descending flight! But see! When within a few yards of the nest he suddenly doubles up his long neck close against his breast, lets fall his legs in a very awkward, dangling manner, spreads his wings and beats the air with a few well-timed strokes until he finally clutches the limb on which he wishes to alight.

During the day we witness the return of many others. They all come from the north. Their fishing grounds are probably on Wildcat Creek, some five or six miles to the northward. In every case the descent is made in essentially the same manner, and each is received with loud croakings by those at home.

But soon all become quiet, except an occasional malcontent who, seemingly not satisfied with his lot, gives evidence of his discontent in spirited quarrelings with those about him. Now the return of another bird puts all in confusion again.

Let us wade about among the trees and estimate the number of nests they contain. It is easy to count at least 130 of them; and there are probably several more. Some trees have but a single nest, but usually there are several in each. And here are twelve in one tall ash, all in use.

These maples and ash are quite tall and without limbs for the first thirty to sixty feet, and as we have no climbing irons we shall not be able to reach many of the nests. But with the aid of a long rope we succeeded in getting to a few. To one end of the rope we tie a long, light but stout string, to the end of which we tie a weight of convenient size. This we throw over a limb of the tree we wish to climb. Taking

hold of the end of the cord that hangs over the limb, the rope is drawn up until it hangs to the ground in a long loop. One now has no difficulty ascending even very large and tall trees, if he makes use of both the rope and the tree. One of us climbs this large maple. There are eleven nests in it, but most of them so far out on the limbs that we dare not venture out to them, so we must be content to stand in the main-top and look down into the nests with their thirty beautiful light green eggs. The usual number to the nest seems to be three, though there are several with only two each, and a few with four as the full nest complement. Not more than four were found in any nest. There are some empty nests and several containing young birds of varying ages,—some just hatched, others large and lusty youngsters, almost ready to fly. Indeed, one large fellow is standing bolt upright on the edge of the nest, and as I attempt to reach him, in trying to fly to another limb, he falls to the ground, a good hundred feet below, his life paying the penalty for his rashness.

But we must not devote the entire day to the herons; the swamp has many other objects well worth seeing. There are other birds that make this their summer home. Here among the button-bushes and the patches of *Scirpus* we find the curious well-built nests of the Red-wing Blackbird,—America's starling. These nests are seen on all sides woven among and hanging in the tall rushes or resting in the crotches of low bushes. The Crow Blackbird, next to the Heron, is the most numerous and noisy bird of the place. Their nests are of mud and grass and small sticks placed in large knot-holes, on top of broken-off snags, in forks of trees, and even in deserted woodpecker holes. We see these nests at all sorts of distances from the ground; here is one on the top of a small rotting stump only three feet above the water, while there is one fully sixty feet high in the fork of that dead maple.

The breeding season is nearly over with the Crow Blackbird, for only young birds are seen in the nests, which nearly all seem about ready to leave.

See that bird flitting across the open space like a flame! It is the American Redstart, one of the daintiest of our birds. Here is its nest in this small elm. It is only six feet above the ground. By standing on this old log we can look down into the nest without disturbing it. How beautifully fluffy its little nest of delicate fibres, moss and feathers is! And how delicately fine are the three little eggs it contains!

A Maryland Yellow-throat flies scolding athwart our course and hides in the clump of grass at the edge of the marsh. From its excited scoldings we know its nest is there, though we are not able to find it.

In the thickets and hawthorns on the banks we find doves, catbirds, brown thrashers, and yellow-breasted chats living together and rearing their young in peace and contentment. And with what a thrill of excitement and delight do we discover that this swamp is a breeding place of the Golden Swamp Warbler, the most beautiful of all our summer birds. We catch a glimpse of a bright-colored bird as it flies from a hole in a small dead snag not far away and disappears in a thicket nearby. We have not long to wait, for the little bird, solicitous for its treasures which must be in the nest in the old snag, soon returns. By short flights and with much anxiety it approaches the nest, and we see it is the Golden Swamp Warbler. We learn that the nest contains five beautiful fresh eggs, and later in the day we find several other nests, none of which we molest. They are all in deserted sapsucker holes, or similar holes, in small dead snags or trees from four to ten feet up.

In another part of the swamp we find several of these little birds not yet mated. The pairing season is on, and the birds are in active courtship. Many a combat between rival males do we see. Near the center of the breeding ground is an acre of comparatively open space, a pond in fact, covered with a thick growth of water-lilies. As we stand near the edge of this pond a couple of males dart by us across the open space, then circle about the pond, the one in close pursuit of the other. Often they cross and re-cross the open

water, circle around its margin, then dart off through the trees and disappear from view, only to return again after a time and repeat the same wild race. Some times the one is not a coward, but stands his ground; then a fierce conflict occurs; frequently they clinch and fall nearly to the water before letting loose. Now they ascend in a spiral flight far up among the tops of the trees, only to return promptly to the pond again. Now they have separated and one of them flies alone in a slow fluttering way across the open space toward the old snag in which the female is building the nest. With wings bent downward, and tail spread so as to show plainly the white of the outer feathers, he gives expression to his happiness in an excited but pleasing little song, which I wish I could describe. Now he perches upon a limb just above my head, where, with drooping, tremulous wings, and head erect, he warbles very prettily his delicate little love song, oblivious of us all except of her who is busy at the old willow snag. Although she seems very busy indeed, she doubtless hears the little song and knows full well its subtle meaning.

These are but a few of the interesting birds that may be seen in and about this fine old Maple Swamp. There are red-eyed vireos, warbling vireos, wood pewees, Baltimore orioles, turtle doves, scarlet tanagers, and many others, but these we must leave until another day.

And now, as we start home in the gloaming, the Great Blue Herons are returning in larger numbers from their feeding grounds along Wild Cat Creek and Deer Creek to the north, and perhaps even from the Wabash to the northwest; the Crow Blackbirds and Redwings come flocking in from the nearby fields and marshes. A Brown Thrasher, perched upon the topmost limb of a tall sassafras in the corner of a field, sings to us as we pass by; while from the hillside across the swamp comes the strange, doleful song of the Whip-poor-will.

The pleasures of the day were not all from the swamp and its denizens. The woods, the fields, the air and all out-doors conspired to entertain us and make us happy. We saw and

heard and felt a hundred beauties which delight the soul and fill it with happy memories. We enjoyed most the fish we didn't catch.

KEEPING FIELD RECORDS.

BY A. F. GAINER.

A detail in connection with bird study which is very generally accepted is the fact that we should keep systematic field notes and records of our observations. Just how to do this in the least irksome manner has been the cause of much thought and the subject of a number of articles on the subject.

The field notebook is used quite generally, but is objectionable, for the reason that it is more or less bulky, and for that reason is often left at home. Again we sometimes have so much respect for the neatness of its contents that we hesitate to scribble in it with a dull pencil, perhaps in the midst of a summer shower or a driving snow. Unless we submit to the expense and bulkiness of a loose-leaf notebook, we are unable to substitute new sheets for old should occasion arise.

After many years of systematic note keeping I have settled upon the card system of keeping field records and find it meets every need. Briefly, the idea is to have printed upon both sides of a 3x5 bristol board card the names of about 130 of the birds most often noted the year 'round. As shown by the illustration, there has been left below such species as the warblers, sparrows, etc., several blank lines for those which are rare and not ordinarily met, to be inserted in pencil should they be encountered. Sufficient space is left on the line behind each name to check off the number of individuals as they are met. Additional blank lines are also left at the end of the list for short notes, etc. The heading speaks for itself.

The cards are 3x5 in size, which dimensions are standard for index cards the country over. For this reason they will